

National Incident Management System

Communications and Incident Management - 2026

Part 2

NIMS Radio Communication Management

I. Introduction

- **Goal:** Establish a common operating picture and ensure interoperability.
- **Core Principles:** Interoperable, reliable, scalable, portable, resilient, redundant, and secure.
- **Key Concept:** Use of **Plain Language**—no 10-codes or agency-specific jargon to reduce confusion.
- **Scope:** Applies to all incident personnel, on-scene or at Emergency Operations Centers (EOC).

II. Communication Structure & Planning

- **Communications Unit (COMU):** Located within the Logistics Section; responsible for creating the Incident Communications Plan, installing equipment, and managing radio networks.
- **ICS Form 205 (Incident Radio Communications Plan):** The standard document used to track assigned frequencies, networks, and channel assignments.
- **Command Structure:**
 - **Tactical Networks:** Used for on-scene operational tasks.
 - **Command Networks:** Used for incident command and staff coordination.
 - **Support Networks:** Used for logistics and resource support.

III. Management of Radio Operations

- **Assignment of Frequencies:** Personnel are assigned specific channels/frequencies and must refrain from using unauthorized frequencies.
- **Radio Interoperability:** Ability of different agencies (police, fire, EMS) to communicate across jurisdictions and disciplines, as authorized.
- **Management Strategies:**
 - **Standardized Naming:** Using consistent channel names to prevent confusion.
 - **Gateway Devices:** Connecting incompatible radio systems to allow shared communication.
- **Incident Communications Center:** A designated center that manages the flow of information.

IV. Protocols and Best Practices

- **Listen Before Transmitting:** Ensure channels are clear.
- **Conciseness:** Keep messages brief, clear, and essential.
- **Identification:** Identify the person you are calling and then yourself (e.g., "Command, Operations").
- **Message Passing:** Using **ICS-213 forms for complex messages**, passing them in 5-to-6-word phrases.
- **Security:** Protecting sensitive information from unauthorized listeners.

V. Conclusion & Key Takeaways

- NIMS requires a structured approach via the COMU and ICS Form 205.
- Interoperability is crucial but requires coordination to prevent over-congestion.
- **Plain Language is Mandatory.**
- All radio communications must support the overall situational awareness of the incident